

CELEBRATE 65Y



CELEBRATING 65 YEARS

**Celebrating 65 Years of a
Dynamic Organization for
School Librarians**

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The American Association of School Librarians as an American Library Association division is sixty-five years young in 2016. It's a birthday. Some of us like to ignore birthdays, hoping this tactic will, somehow, keep us ageless. But others of us, me included, love to celebrate a day that is uniquely ours.

For those of us who love a birthday, the question is not *if* we should be celebrating, but *why* and *how*? The *how* is covered in another article in this issue. The *why* begins with the opportunity to think back over the past and what happened earlier in our history as school librarians that allowed us to be in the position to celebrate our sixty-fifth birthday as a division of ALA.

We owe a great deal to the National Education Association (NEA). In 1896 NEA formed a library section (Cecil and Heaps 1940, 52), but there were no professional school librarians. It was not until Mary A. Kingsbury was appointed in 1900 as school librarian at Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn, New York, that we had a professional in place in a school library.

Our profession didn't grow rapidly. In many locations, the public library placed branches in high schools, and elementary schools placed books in room libraries. When the high school library was funded by the school district, it was under the supervision of a teacher or, in some fortunate instances, a professional school librarian.

Early Days in ALA

ALA, in December 1914, "formed a School Library Section, 'to further in every way possible the development of effective school libraries,' and immediately set in operation two committees; the first, Secondary School Library Administration; and

the second, Professional Training of the School Librarian" (Cecil and Heaps 1940, 64). In August of the next year, NEA joined with the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools to create C. C. Certain's "Standard Library Organization and Equipment for Secondary Schools of Different Sizes," and in 1920 the document was approved by ALA's Committee of Education and published by ALA. In 1925 ALA also published a second report by Certain, "Elementary School Library Standards" (Cecil and Heaps 1940, 65).

Funding for schools was substantially reduced during the Great Depression, but by 1932 "Legal codes of 45 states provide organization to aid in the promotion and direction of school library service" (Cecil and Heaps 1940, 73). NEA published a chart showing the legal provision for the establishment of school libraries between 1935 and 1939. Three of the forty-eight states had no legal provision at all. Legal provisions were "permissive" for thirty states but mandatory for fifteen states. Contractual relations were also in place with existing public libraries in twenty-seven states; under these agreements some school libraries were operated as branches of public libraries (Cecil and Heaps 1940, 73).

In 1940 Henry J. Cecil and Willard A. Heaps reported that "The educational or teachers' associations of thirty-four states have sections for school libraries" (131):

When school librarians are members of library sections within state educational associations they are generally considered as essentials in the school system, and the place of the school library is more readily acknowledged. Such

affiliations also enhance the importance and status of the school librarian. (Cecil and Heaps 1940, 131)

School librarians also had a solid place in the world of librarianship. AASL had been poised to emerge, so to speak, for six years previously. Our name, AASL, has been in use since 1944 as a part of the Division of Libraries for Children and Young People (DLCYP). By 1950 school librarians were strongly advocating for division status. The October 1950 *Top of the News* periodical published by the DLCYP noted that Dr. Frances Henne was going to summarize a preconference held in Cleveland where the process of separating into a division was discussed. At that point 25 state departments of education and 125 cities provided library supervision, and AASL had 2,197 members, an increase from 1,492 members in 1948 (Highlights 1950, 30):

Publication has not been neglected. *Audio-Visual School Library Service* (A.L.A., 1949) by Margaret Rufsvold.... A new edition of Mary P. Douglas's *Teacher Librarian Handbook* (A.L.A., 1949).... a brochure on school library planning by Mildred Nickel (A.L.A., 1950) and numerous articles in both library and professional magazines testify to the articulateness of various A.A.S.L. members. (Highlights 1950, 33)

AASL as a Division

The ALA Midwinter Meeting 1951 was held in Chicago in "fifteen below zero weather" (Nicholson 1951, 16), and the board of the DLCYP noted:

The withdrawal of one section from the Division made surprisingly little change in

organization or operation necessary. Board members and councilors who had been elected from A.A.S.L. went with the new Division of American Association of School Librarians. The only officer of the Division elected from A.A.S.L. was the president. The Board unanimously request that she continue in office until her term expires. (Nicholson 1951, 16)

Also in the March 1951 issue of *Top of the News*, Margaret Nicholson told of the “work done to produce such phenomenal growth [of A.A.S.L.]” and reported that, according to Lucile Vickers, the Planning School Library Quarters Committee had almost finished its work. In the same article, Nicholson also reported that the nominating committee that year included Eleanor Ahlers among others, and the “Proposed Constitution and By-Laws” document was printed as submitted by Rheta Clark, chair, and members Ruth Ersted, C. Elizabeth Johnson, and Margaret Rufsvold.¹

Through the years AASL’s activities have enhanced school librarianship. Perhaps one of the most notable is that the concept of an assembly of state representatives existed from the beginning of AASL’s history as a division. The State Assembly created by our first constitution is now our Affiliate Assembly, and it continues to be made up of representatives from a school library organization in each state. These delegates meet at both the ALA Midwinter Meeting and ALA Annual Conference to bring concerns from their state associations to the attention of the AASL Board of Directors.

¹ Eleanor Ahlers was David Loertscher’s professor at the University of Washington, and both he and I were students of Margaret Rufsvold at Indiana University.

That was then, this is now. The question for each of us is: What will members be doing to celebrate in 2081?

AASL has published standards for school libraries at intervals beginning in 1948. The association has also been responsible for major funding initiatives that helped school library programs meet those standards. In 1962 the Knapp Foundation awarded a grant of \$1,130,000 to improve resources in school libraries and to demonstrate and publicize the value of school libraries. The project, guided by AASL’s 1960 learning standards and by AASL members, provided demonstration schools and publicized the value of effective school library programs. The project was so successful that the Knapp Foundation followed up with another grant (\$1,163,718) that focused on school librarians’ roles, training, and recruitment (Bertram 2014). Also, from 1988–1998 the Dewitt Wallace Reader’s Digest Fund provided \$40,000,000 that enabled nineteen communities, over the course of three years, to show how a school library that met standards would function and the positive effects of those school libraries on their learning communities (Stripling 1997).

AASL members are involved in the education of school librarians as faculty members in departments and schools in colleges and universities preparing school librarians. Members may serve on the ALA Committee on Accreditation,

reviewing applications from schools, and they may also be members of the teams who visit library and information science programs to review their curriculum, faculty, students, and facilities.

AASL members are also part of the process for development of credentials for the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), which accredits programs in teacher education institutions. These programs are usually part of a college or department of education within a university, and in some states this accreditation is a part of the licensing process for school librarians as well as teachers.

AASL’s Future

That was then, this is now. The question for each of us is: What will members be doing to celebrate in 2081? Will our profession be surviving and thriving? Or will schools have returned to the situation almost 130 years previously, when there were no school librarians? In the next sixty-five years, will AASL’s influence decline or will the association be even stronger, supporting at least one school librarian in every school? AASL President (1998–1999) Sharon Coatney recently described the school librarian’s role as being essential to:

- Enhance student achievement
- Protect student privacy
- Provide a safe place for all types of students
- Protect and promote students' right to read and right to know
- Provide information-literacy instruction
- Furnish students with a window to the world now and in the future
- Enable students to dream
- Encourage students to become involved in things "beyond themselves"
- Provide instruction and exposure to new technologies and other new learning environments
- Encourage and promote collaboration with teachers to make the best learning environment possible for all types of students
- Encourage the love of reading
- Promote lifelong learning with all stakeholders
- Provide a model of learning to all patrons
- Provide a place to make, create, and inquire (Coatney 2016)

A few of us could be around in sixty-five years to celebrate what we have done in the twenty-first century to continue the legacy of those giants of the mid-twentieth century. Today our organization stands on the foundation they built. What can we do to continue to build on that legacy? If AASL is alive and well in 2081, what would the reasons be?

Some of the reasons AASL and our profession will continue to thrive are the same reasons we joined AASL in the first place. AASL:

- Supports school librarians as they provide open access to information for our teachers and students
- Helps members share and solve problems in the profession
- Advocates for the role of school libraries and school librarians in the continued provision of access to information
- Works for the common good of all school librarians and students
- Highlights excellence in school libraries by annually bestowing the National School Library Program of the Year Award
- Honors our outstanding colleagues through awards to individuals
- Develops standards for good practice
- Allows members to practice leadership skills leading groups within AASL
- Supports and protects members when parents or even teacher colleagues threaten students' intellectual freedom. (Do you have the number of ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom in your desk drawer?)
- Provides representation and programming at ALA's Midwinter Meeting and Annual Conference as well as at our own biannual AASL National Conference, allowing members to meet other school librarians, educators, and supervisors from across the nation
- Offers a forum for school librarians to communicate across state lines and to learn best practices
- Allows members to hone their public-speaking skills with presentations at AASL conferences
- Has sections for educators of school librarians, independent school librarians, and supervisors of school librarians
- Provides professional learning opportunities through webinars
- Joins in a collective effort of school librarians to support students in all schools—elementary, middle, high school, charter schools, private schools, and even home-schooled students—to open access to information resources essential to education in the twenty-first century
- Publishes *Knowledge Quest* and the research reported in our online peer-reviewed journal, *School Library Research*
- Supports a collective voice, a national voice that ties us together into a mighty force, to describe what we do in our schools, to help us reach lawmakers whose votes provide support to our programs
- Provides an office and staff members who not only manage the association but also help members with challenges to be met and answer queries about school librarians and libraries from persons both within the U.S. and internationally

When AASL is still a viable entity for sixty-five more years, it will be because each of us—all of us who *are* AASL—have in 2016 gone beyond simply considering that we have "done our duty" just by paying our membership dues. Association dues may seem a sizeable amount when writing that check or looking at that charge on a credit card statement. However, it doesn't seem so much when you open your copy of *Knowledge Quest*, learn from a members-only webinar, read the latest *School Library Research*, or attend your state conference and hear the report of your delegate to the AASL Affiliate Assembly. AASL dues don't seem so much when you know that, even though you are a single person in your school library, you are surrounded by colleagues who are ready and willing to help in times of stress, such as when intellectual freedom is challenged in your school,

or decision makers threaten to cut your job or budget.

You can add to your membership benefits by beginning or continuing your active participation in the governance structure of the association: join or chair a committee, work on a task force, allow your name to be submitted as a candidate for an AASL election as an officer or as representative to the ALA Council. You can participate in AASL's continuing education activities and help plan future professional development opportunities. You can even teach other school librarians, sharing your knowledge. Ask your supervisor for permission (and funding, if at all possible) to attend AASL conferences, and even when you aren't fully funded, make every effort to attend. You can submit a proposal for you and one of your teachers, or even your principal, to conduct a session at the AASL National Conference.

Perhaps most of all, you can recruit your colleagues to join AASL and join in the national voice for school librarians. You also need to recruit future school librarians from among your best teachers and students. Tell them about the university programs in your area where they can begin the process of learning how to manage and lead a school library program. Our recruiting efforts will ensure our having qualified people to follow in our footsteps and to blaze new paths in the profession.

Commemorating the Past by Paying It Forward

All of the above are reasons why you joined AASL and why you encourage others to join, thus guaranteeing the long-term existence of our association. At this time, our birthday celebration, we need a little more: your financial contributions

Your contributions of money, effort, and time show that you are as committed to our association as the visionaries who believed in school libraries as early as 1900 and continued to do so throughout the twentieth century.

to confirm your belief that AASL and school librarianship should be alive and well and thriving in 2081. Please read Carl Harvey's article in this issue; it's about the "It's in Our Hands" campaign. Your donation will confirm your belief in our essential role in the lives of our students, our teachers, our schools, our districts, our cities, our states, and our nation. We know that with our contributions and through our continued work together, we will maintain our unique position of providing access to information to all the students, all the teachers, all the time. Future school librarians will be able to continue preparing students to seek the best information to solve problems in school and for the rest of their lives. School librarians will continue to be a strong force for helping prepare our students to use a variety of accurate, relevant resources to make decisions, to gather information to create new information, and—most important of all—to lead successful and fulfilling lives, preserving our democracy.

Your contributions of money, effort, and time show that you are as committed to our association

as the visionaries who believed in school libraries as early as 1900 and continued to do so throughout the twentieth century—but especially in 1950 and 1951 as they worked to establish AASL as a full-fledged division of ALA. You will join those who are meeting this call for action. It is a time when we can stand up and be counted. We, members of AASL, need to support our association all of the time, but in 2016 we have an opportunity to give a real birthday gift to AASL and students in the future. Happy Birthday!



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1994, is a San Jose State
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program director. An AASL member, she recently served on the 65th Celebration Task Force. She has received many honors, including the Pennsylvania School Librarians Association Outstanding Contributor Award, AASL's Distinguished Service Award, and an Indiana University School of Library and Information Science Distinguished Alumna Award.